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Growing Up in North Carolina

by

Charles Kuralt

and

*The Uncommon Laureate:
Sketches in the Life of Charles Kuralt*

by

Wallace H. Kuralt, Jr.



*Together with Proceedings of a Banquet on the Occasion of the
Presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1993*

NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS
NUMBER 23

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Growing Up in North Carolina

by

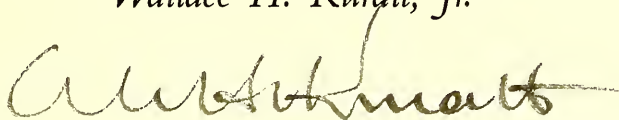
Charles Kuralt

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The Uncommon Laureate: Sketches in the Life of Charles Kuralt

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Wallace H. Kuralt, Jr.", with a stylized, flowing script.

*Together with Proceedings of a Banquet on the Occasion of the
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Chapel Hill
NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY, INC.
AND NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION
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I

AN AFTERNOON WITH CHARLES KURALT

As a prelude to "An Evening with Charles Kuralt," the North Caroliniana Society invited Charles Kuralt to give a public address in Hanes Art Center Auditorium on Friday afternoon, 21 May 1993. His subject, "Growing Up in North Carolina," included reflections on the first six years of his life. His paper, preceded by an introduction by William C. Friday, president of the Society, is published herein.

Charles Bishop Kuralt was born in Wilmington on 10 September 1934, the first son of Wallace Hamilton and Ina Bishop Kuralt. Following graduation from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1955, he was a reporter for the Charlotte News, 1955-57; writer for CBS News, 1957-59; correspondent for CBS News, 1959 to the present; and is host of the CBS News program "Sunday Morning." His books include *To the Top of the World* (1968), *Dateline America* (1979), *On the Road with Charles Kuralt* (1985), *Southerners* (1986), *North Carolina Is My Home* (1986), and *A Life on the Road* (1990). Recipient of the Ernie Pyle Memorial Award in 1956 and Broadcaster of the Year Award in 1985, he has also won multiple Emmys and George Foster Peabody Broadcasting awards. At a dinner following the address published herein, he received the 1993 North Caroliniana Society Award for outstanding contributions to the history and culture of his native North Carolina.



Introduction of Charles Kuralt

by

William C. Friday

[President Friday first introduced Charles Kuralt's father, Wallace H. Kuralt, Sr., and brother, Wallace H. Kuralt, Jr.]

Those of you who have had the joy of viewing "North Carolina Is My Home," that great television program that Charles and his friend Loonis McGlohon did, may remember a very special section in which Charles talks about his Grandfather Bishop and of that swing out on the tree from which he could see to the end of the lane. I have always felt that it was from those experiences and from that time that Charles's lifelong advocacy of nature—the birds and animals and flowers and trees—was born. He had a wonderful boyhood, followed by his growing up in Charlotte and then his journey here at Chapel Hill, where we all knew him as student and editor. Charles, it is really refreshing to find a national voice like yours that talks about nature but that also talks about and shows compassion and deep concern for human values, and it is especially heartwarming to all of us to know that those words and that mind and that heart come from one who is in the University family. So we salute you. Your essays have taken on much more strength of late, and I am glad to hear you speaking out so intently on some issues. You get us started that way on Sunday morning, and then it is that sense of harmony that you have with nature that closes every Sunday and sends us on our way into a new week of work and enjoyment. Like all of our members, I rejoice in your success and your continuing love and abiding devotion to Chapel Hill and this University. Charles, we all look forward to hearing about your "Growing Up in North Carolina."



Growing Up in North Carolina

by
Charles Kuralt

I was in Oslo, Norway, last month working on some stories about Norway in preparation for the Winter Olympic Games to be held there next year. I wanted to do a story about the Nobel Peace Prize, which, under the terms of Alfred Nobel's will, is awarded in Oslo, you know, so I dropped around to the Nobel Institute and asked the director if I might have the use of the Peace Prize gold medal for the afternoon. I wanted to take it down the street to the magnificent room in the Oslo City Hall where the Prize is awarded each year in order that I might stand in the room holding the medal and talk about it on camera. The director was agreeable, and asked an assistant to bring the medal to his office. It arrived in a fine, velvet-lined walnut box, which was handed to me. Just as I was about to depart, the director said, "Oh, I suppose it might be a good idea for you to give me a receipt." He wrote one out on Nobel Institute stationery, and I signed it. When I returned the medal, he gave me the receipt, and I have it. It says, "I have received the Nobel Peace Prize. . . ."

Of course, this makes me one with Mother Teresa.

Except for the next line, which reads, ". . . and I promise to return it by 10 o'clock tomorrow morning."

This experience makes me especially grateful for the award of the North Caroliniana Society, which I am to receive tonight, and which H. G. Jones assures me I do not have to return at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

I am deeply sensible of the honor of joining a company that includes men and women I have admired most of my life, the previous recipients of this award—the likes of Bill and Ida Friday, William S. Powell, Paul Green, and so on, a North Carolina Pantheon. By comparison, I have done little to deserve this recognition. But I have welcomed the chance to rummage around in my North Carolina memories, and to blurt them out here, just as if they would be interesting to you. I might have yielded to the temptation to talk about my teenage years in Charlotte at the old Central High School and my happy four years in Chapel Hill and my return to Charlotte to work for *The Charlotte News* when that newspaper was an exemplar of all that journalism should be in a small southern city (which Charlotte was back then). But my brother, Wallace, is going to touch on those aspects of my life, and probably touch on them none too softly, at a dinner of the Society this evening. So I have set

myself a greater challenge: to limit myself to memories Wallace doesn't have — namely, my life in North Carolina prior to 1940.

Since I was born in 1934, this idea, it may seem to you, does not hold much hope of providing an interesting hour. But my earliest memories are ones I never before have trotted out in public, and my hope is that they will prove instructive to young people in the audience, and provide those of my own age with certain memories of their own.

In fact, my early North Carolina upbringing was, on the surface, unexceptional, except, perhaps, for the number of places we lived in my youth. I was born in Wilmington, but I have no recollection of Wilmington; I only went there to be born. We lived in Lumberton, but I do not remember Lumberton; I was too young. We lived in Fayetteville; ditto. My first memories are of Stedman, a hamlet near Fayetteville, where my mother was the home economics teacher at the Stedman school within sight of our house. In the folklore of our family, there is a story that I embarrassed my parents by bragging in polite company back home in Onslow County that our house in Stedman had an indoor toilet. Well, it did.

I went back to Stedman a few years ago, and found everything just as I remembered it: the old house, still unpainted, with a great welcoming porch; the enormous magnolia tree in the front yard; the same sandy walk beside the road toward the store and the railroad track, passing the same picket fence enclosing the same strawberry patch. (Imagine, a patch of our progressive and industrious and rapidly developing state that has found no better use than to produce sweet strawberries for more than fifty summers!) The small wooden railroad station, however, was on the wrong side of the road, and had become the post office. I walked into the post office to ask whether I was right about this. The woman behind the counter said, "Oh yes, the train doesn't stop here any more. We moved this building in about 1947." I was satisfied with that and thanked her. But she was still peering at me. She had something to say. She said, "How is your mother?" I said, "She's fine," which was true at the time. She said, "Your mother taught me everything I ever learned about cooking and keeping house."

So that was my gift from Stedman, to have my mother well-remembered there.

My own memories of Stedman are mostly of my mother. My father hugged us all goodbye on Sunday afternoons and walked across the highway with a black suitcase and stuck out his thumb. I remember watching until a car stopped and picked him up. He was hitch-hiking to Chapel Hill. He already had his University of North Carolina degree, with honors in business, I now under-

stand, and his Phi Beta Kappa key, but those were of little use in the circumstances of 1938. He had returned to school to study in a line of work that he had found interesting, and where good people were actually in demand, even in the Depression—especially in the Depression! My father was spending that year at the Graduate School of Social Work . . . never imagining, I am certain, that he was embarking on a pioneering career, humane and compassionate, that would result, more than fifty years later, in the establishment of the first named professorship in the history of the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina, the Wallace H. Kuralt chair . . . or that he would be back in Chapel Hill one day to hear his son mention that fact. It gives me great pleasure, Papa, to mention that fact.

So from Sunday to Friday, when he came hitchhiking home again, my father was gone, away over the horizon in Chapel Hill. From 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. on school days, my mother was gone, teaching school in the brick building I could see from my bedroom, and life in Stedman was sometimes a little boring for a four-year-old. One day, I relieved the boredom by finding a pair of scissors and rearranging the patches on my mother's favorite patchwork quilt. Rosa caught me at it. Rosa was the patient, beautiful, young black woman who was my baby-sitter, whom I loved, and who loved me, too, and who told me stories, and made me apple butter, and was right about everything; which is why I remember her alarming remark of that day: "When your mother comes home, you are going to get a spanking!" I had all afternoon to reflect on this dire prediction, and to wonder whether it might prove true. It *did* prove true, which made me feel miserable for myself, but more certain than ever that Rosa really *was* right about everything.

I have one other memory of Stedman, which fixes that village in time. The word came that President Roosevelt's train would be coming to Stedman, on the way from Warm Springs back to Washington. The hour was after my bedtime, but I remember walking in the twilight with my mother and father past the picket fence and the strawberry patch, down to the train station. There we stood with all of Stedman, dozens of other people, standing there as the dusk turned to dark, all of us waiting. Presently, we saw the headlight far down the track. It grew nearer and brighter, and we could hear the train approaching. It whistled for the crossing, a deafening mournful whistle, and it flashed past us, the great engine and several cars, in a blast of steam and cinders. Perhaps there were lights in the cars; I don't remember. In an instant, the train vanished away to the north, and the night was silent again. And everybody turned away and walked home, satisfied. We had seen President Roosevelt's train go by.

We moved to Salisbury. We lived in a brick house on a hill above the

highway. I can fix Salisbury in time, too. I had a playmate named Billy. Usually we played with a ball in Billy's yard, or, more satisfactorily, with toy soldiers in the dirt under Billy's house, a sort of stinking sandbox polluted by rotten chinaberries and dog droppings, a place where, for some reason, we were happy. But one day, we were up on the hill, watching the cars go by on the highway, when one of them pulled off on the shoulder, with engine trouble, I suppose, and a man got out and opened the hood. And the hood didn't open from one side or the other, like an accordion, the way hoods opened then. It opened from the front, all in one piece, and held itself open while the man peered inside. Up on the hill, Billy and I were amazed. We felt we had just witnessed the coming of a new age, and we ran home to tell our mothers.

We moved to Washington, North Carolina, on the Pamlico River. There, my friends and I wore towels as capes and played Superman, or rode broomsticks as cowboys, or wore towels *and* rode sticks as Superman on horseback. We all had a stick for a horse, except for Charles, a rich boy who lived in a great white house on the river, who had a *horse* for a horse. Since none of us had a horse, and since he wouldn't climb down from his horse and ride a stick, we never played with him. I felt sorry for him, and wished to befriend him, but couldn't think of a way. It was my first experience with the camaraderie of the common people and the loneliness of the upper classes. There was nothing to be done about it.

There, on the riverbank, we found part of a raft, and boarded it, and launched ourselves a little way down the river beside the bank until the raft grew tippy and threatened to float out into the main current, whereupon we all jumped off and clambered ashore soaking wet, and dried ourselves in the sun and promised never to tell. And until this moment, I believe I never have.

In Washington, North Carolina, a number of things happened that affected my life ever after. My brother was born there. This was a nuisance. I knew he would prove to be a thorn in my side, which he has been from time to time, most recently yesterday morning when he took me out to Finley Golf Course and beat me by 17 strokes.

So I gained my first sibling in Washington. Far more important at the time, I caught my first fish. My father and I were trolling from a rowboat in the Pamlico River. We had reeled in to pass under the railroad bridge . . . everybody knew that eels were all you caught under the railroad bridge, and they snarled your line terribly . . . and just as we cast our lines out again, I felt a shock go through my arms and shoulders. I can feel that shock today. My father dropped the oars to keep the rod from flying out of my hands, but he let me do as much of the reeling as I could, and helped me land a giant

rock fish, as they are known in Beaufort County, a striped bass, fully five pounds, which soon flailed around in the bottom of the boat.

"Hold onto him!" my father shouted as he started rowing hard for shore. But I couldn't hold on to him; I didn't know where to hold. So I threw myself upon that fish, weighted him down with my whole body, and with my whole heart and soul, and struggled all the way to the dock to prevent that fish from getting away.

We took my fish home to the Green Court Apartments. We put him in a washpan, over the ends of which his head and tail extended. We walked him upstairs to a neighbor's where my mother was attending a meeting of the Garden Club.

"I caught him!" I said. I pointed to my slimy shirt.

"Oh, you bought him at the fish store," my mother said and touched him. Whereupon that fish did me the great favor of flopping, to show that he was not a storebought fish. My mother squealed. I beamed.

That day made me a fisherman. I do my fishing in Montana now, casting bits of fur and feather into the current in the hope of fooling wise old trout, in rivers where the striped bass do not run. I mostly put the fish back, out of sportsmanship, I tell myself, but possibly out of disappointment that they are never so big any more that I have to fall on them to hold them down.

In Washington, though I am sure we couldn't afford it, we acquired a set of *World Book* encyclopedias. After that, I never got a simple answer to a childhood question. It was always, "Well, let's go look it up" from my father.

And I started school in Washington . . . or rather, kindergarten, at the only kindergarten in town, the one at St. Agnes Academy, the Catholic School. There, Sister Rosalind was impressed that I could read; at least I could read the gas station logos and certain billboards and certain children's books and certain words from the *World Book* encyclopedia. She was also impressed that when some of the other children went to Anthony Abayounis's birthday party instead of coming to school, I came to school instead of going to Anthony Abayounis's birthday party. And when, in the course of being told, "Thou shalt worship no graven images," I piped up and asked then what were all those statues of the Virgin Mary and the Saints doing around the school, the other nuns frowned, but Sister Rosalind smiled. She promoted me to the first grade, though I was barely five.

This was no favor to me, in fact. It was to mean that all the way through school, I was at least a year younger than my classmates. I had one year's less experience than they at dealing with such things as baseball and dancing and flirting and dating. I was to feel a little awkward and inexperienced later on

in high school. I was actually enrolled as a freshman in the University as an innocent of 16. My pals were all older than I, my girlfriends were older, in time my wives were to be older than I—both of them. All because of Sister Rosalind.

At the time, of course, I thought it was wonderful to be in the first grade. Not as wonderful as catching a fish, but very nice, and I worked hard at my school work and stopped saying anything about graven images, so that Sister Rosalind would be proud of me. She taught us numbers and words, and not just English words, either, but also French words. I remember the French word for piano. It is “piano.” I thought I could catch on to this French if it continued that way.

Summertimes and holidays, we often returned to my mother’s home in the corner of Onslow County that long-time residents still refer to as “Southwest.” I remember every detail of life there on the hundred-acre tobacco farm that seemed to me the authentic center of the world. I remember every mole hill in the sandy front yard of the old house, and the location of every sycamore tree in the side yard, and the place of every outbuilding . . . the hay loft which also housed the farm cart, the corncrib where I was startled by a snake. (Don’t be afraid, said my playmate from the farm down the road, it’s only a grain snake. I thought for years that the name of that reptile was grain snake, the kind of snake that frequents corn cribs. The day arrived when I realized he was saying “green snake” in the accent of Southwest Onslow County.)

I remember Buck, the youngest son of the black family who lived up the road in the other direction, and whose yard I always visited until Christmas of 1939 when Santa Claus brought me a bicycle. After that, Buck visited *my* yard, offering to teach me to ride. He taught by example, up and down the road and around the yard, by the hour, calling back over his shoulder, “See how easy it is?” until I wished his mother would call him home.

I remember my grandfather, John Bishop, his white moustache tobacco stained, clad always in overalls. I was in awe of him. He could do anything expertly—split a log or slaughter a hog or ride a mule or cure a ham or chink a tobacco barn—and everything, he did expertly, with a certain easy style, and everything he did, he offered to let me try, too. I remember him sitting on his tool box in the shade of the side yard with a bucket of oysters, methodically opening them, scooping the oysters into his mouth with the oyster knife and tossing the shells back into the bucket. And I remember his laughter when he offered to let me try that, too, and I made a face and ran away.

Sometimes, I was left in the care of my grandmother. This was always a joy. She was a teacher and reader of books. She taught half the children in

that part of the county to read, and she read to me from the travel books of Richard Halliburton and the short stories of O. Henry and the poems of Kipling and Poe. I do believe I gained a love of words and the rhythm of language from my grandmother, Rena Bishop, and perhaps a sense of the romance of travel, too. From her, I heard for the first time such words as “Sphinx” and “pagoda” and “igloo” and “Taj Mahal.” And I worked my way through books on her shelf which she never read to me at all, learning words on my own, the most exciting of which was in a book of stories by Guy DeMaupassant. It still gives me a little thrill to hear the word: “chemise.”

At my grandmother’s house, I gained a liberal education—more liberal than even she knew, as you see. And this in a house without plumbing or electricity on a dirt road a long way from town. I am acquainted with city people who think of country people as backward and uneducated. I knew better than that before I was six years old.

One day, I saw my grandmother standing at the end of the driveway, and when I ran out to join her, I was startled to see that she was crying, wiping her eyes with her apron. I had never seen her cry and it upset me. But it needn’t have. Those were tears of joy. Up the road, off in the distance, were coming the REA light poles that would banish the kerosene lamps and give us a proud bare electric light bulb hanging over the table in the kitchen. That farm entered modern times, which finally, of course, consumed the farm. The farm yard is the parking lot of a supermarket now, the house and the barn and the sycamore trees all gone, and there is no sign of the rich life that was lived there in the time when my grandmother read to me.

Thinking back on those days, I see a theme . . . one that has emerged as a major theme and question of life in America all these years later—namely, what is a working couple . . . my mother and father in this early example . . . going to do with a young child, in this early example—me? It was my parents’ effort to answer this question that made the gentle and infallible Rosa, and her apple butter and buttermilk biscuits, such an important part of my early life, and Sister Rosalind, who taught me French, or tried to, and my grandmother, who read me poetry, and other caretakers of different ages, religions, colors, sexes. I learned from each of them. In the small towns of North Carolina, I now understand, and before my sixth birthday, I was becoming cosmopolitan!

My father was now a field supervisor for the state Department of Public Welfare, and of all those who took turns caring for me, he was my favorite. It sometimes fell to him to take me along on his visits to the welfare offices in the county seats of eastern North Carolina, and I loved these trips. Here, I quote myself, from a memoir I wrote a few years ago, *A Life on the Road*.

We rolled along the country roads to the old tidewater towns, Edenton and Plymouth and New Bern and Swanquarter, my father smoking Tampa Nuggets and spinning yarns for my amusement. He tried a little history on me, thinking to improve my mind: "The people here didn't like the British governor, and had a fight with the British at this bridge." He filled me with local lore: "At Harkers Island over there, they make wonderful strong boats and go to sea in them." He taught me to read the Burma-Shave signs: "'Twould Be More Fun . . . To Go by Air . . . But We Couldn't Put . . . These Signs Up There. Burma-Shave." We stopped in the afternoons to fish for a few minutes in roadside creeks turned black by the tannin of cypress trees, my father casting a red-and-white plug expertly with the old bait-casting rod he carried in the trunk, and patiently picking out the backlashes that snarled the reel when I tried it. We stopped for suppers of pork chops, sweet potatoes and collard greens at roadside cafes, and rolled on into the night, bound for some tourist home down the road, my father telling tales and I listening in rapture, just the two of us, rolling on, wrapped in a cloud of companionship and smoke from his five-cent cigar.

Years later, when my father served for nearly thirty years as Superintendent of Public Welfare of Mecklenburg County, he started a great county day care initiative, establishing child development centers for the pre-school children of working mothers. It was an idea that occurred to him many years before its time. He sold it to the county commissioners on the grounds that it would put welfare mothers back to work. But I think it was the children he was thinking of. Every one of those day care centers had a set of *World Book* encyclopedias.

My father had the notion, still has it, that by the age of six, before the institutions of society get hold of a child, the child's life already is pretty well formed, for good or ill. He or she will already have been well-loved, or not, and will have known some successes and gained some confidence, and formed some interests and some childish ambition, or not.

And I, thinking back on the days before I was six, find nothing in this theory to disagree with. I see that I was a little boy of no money, but much privilege. I wish every child in our state, and in the world, the kind of childhood I had in the Depression days of the 1930s in North Carolina.





II

AN EVENING WITH CHARLES KURALT

On the evening of Friday, 21 May 1993, in the Carolina Inn, Chapel Hill, friends and family attended a reception and banquet honoring Charles Kuralt on the occasion of his acceptance of the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1993. The award recognized Kuralt for his contributions to the enhancement, preservation, and promotion of North Carolina's cultural heritage. The master of ceremonies was H. G. Jones, curator of the North Carolina Collection and secretary-treasurer of the North Caroliniana Society; and the award was presented by William C. Friday, president of the Society. Their remarks, along with the recipient's response and the address given by his only brother, Wallace Hamilton Kuralt, Jr., are published in this the twenty-third number of the North Caroliniana Society Imprints series.



Opening Remarks and Introductions

by
by H. G. Jones

Friends of Charles Kuralt, and those who love to browse in Wallace's Intimate Bookshops: Welcome to this Kuralt family reunion. If this head table seems to be arranged in an unorthodox manner, it is because we have broken precedent by seating father and sons together on one side. They may want to trade some family secrets during dinner.

Bill and Ida Friday and I will share the company of Wallace's Brenda on the Carrboro end of the table. On the New Hope Creek side, let us welcome the distinguished North Carolinian for whom the Wallace H. Kuralt professorship in public policy and administration is named, father Wallace H. Kuralt, Sr., and his boys—Wallace, Jr., and, of course, the man on the road, Charles. We regret that daughter and sister Catherine could not get here from the state of Washington in time for dinner.

Now, please enjoy some nourishment before we turn on the talkers.

[Dinner followed.]

The North Caroliniana Society is not really a secret organization, but it is a very modest one, intentionally small, that stresses substance rather than show, accomplishment rather than pronouncement, and service rather than dues. Our purpose is simple: to promote increased knowledge and understanding of North Carolina's historical and cultural heritage. Twenty years ago, in his memorable address, "The Veil of Humility," our immediate past president said, "...we are the modern recipients of all that has gone on before. What we are today is in almost exact proportion to who they [earlier generations] were and what they did in the yesterdays of our past." No person better characterizes the ideal North Carolinian than the gentleman who spoke those words, and I am pleased to call upon his successor and devoted friend, one Tar Heel who truly needs no introduction, President William Friday.

[President Friday, expressing enormous gratitude and good wishes, presented the Society's Honorary Life Membership to Archie K. Davis in absentia.]

Archie, you were already the only member of the Society who continues

to register as a student every semester. Now you are also our only Honorary Life Member. We know that you and Mary Louise are with us tonight in spirit.

Beginning with Paul Green in 1978, the North Caroliniana Society Award has recognized men and women who have made noteworthy contributions to the cultural life of our state. The historic sterling bowl representing the award, sitting here on the table, looks much more imposing in its handsome floor-based ensemble, designed by John and Ann Sanders, in the Reading Room of the North Carolina Collection. The simplicity of the smaller sterling goblet that goes to the honoree is suggestive of the character of a modest people. Sadly, several of our recipients have passed away, one of them—Gertrude Carraway—just two weeks ago. Happily, though, some are with us again tonight: 1984, William and Ida Friday; 1985, William S. Powell; 1988, William McWhorter Cochrane; 1991, Lawrence F. London; and we always like to include Albert Coates's beloved Gladys, as young as ever after celebrating her 91st birthday this week.

As is our custom, the proceedings of this evening, as well as Charles's fascinating address this afternoon, will be preserved in No. 23 in our signed, limited-edition North Caroliniana Society Imprint series, a copy of which will go to you later this year.

When we first approached Charles about accepting the North Caroliniana Society Award for 1993, he said he would come provided he could bring his bus filled with his papers that are running him out of office and home. I reminded him that Chapel Hill doesn't have parking for automobiles, much less a bus. Furthermore, we have over in Wilson Library a young clone of deRoulhac Hamilton—also beginning to acquire the nickname Ransack—and we should not deprive him of the privilege of driving a van in New York City traffic. So, David Moltke-Hansen, Charles awaits your call, for he has graciously agreed to place his papers in the the University Library, exactly where they should be. Please join me in expressing appreciation to Charles for this reaffirmation of the title of his wonderful video and book, *North Carolina Is My Home*.

Some of you may have observed that on the printed program there is no Jr. or Sr. after the name of our speaker. We hope that kept you in suspense, for who better could tell us about Charles Kuralt than his father or brother? We chose brother Wallace, for he is a fixture here in this University town; furthermore, we suspect that he can share with us some youthful memories that Charles may not have mentioned—accidentally or deliberately—this afternoon. If there be disagreement over such memories, father Wallace can be the arbiter.

Wallace himself has had a colorful and highly successful career, starting with his exalted position as a waiter in Lenoir Hall and his formation of UNC's

Pep Band. One gets the impression in conversation that two people enormously influenced his career—Paul and Bunny Smith, of hallowed memory, who introduced him to the book business more than a third of a century ago. At the Smith's bookshop in Provincetown, Massachusetts, Wallace met his bride-to-be, and in 1965 they purchased the Intimate Bookshops. Even as the Intimate has grown and multiplied, the shops have retained a down-homeness that draws patrons from all over the country. Those who know of the devastating fire that burned the main Franklin Street store will be comforted to know that construction crews are on the job, and a new Intimate Bookshop within the old walls may open as early as September. New it may be, but Wallace promises that its built-in squeaky stairways and floors will make old timers feel right at home.

North Carolina's premiere bookman, Charles's little brother, Wallace Kuralt, Jr.



*The Uncommon Laureate:
Sketches in the Life of Charles Kuralt*
Or
Darn Right He's Heavy—He's My Brother
by
Wallace H. Kuralt, Jr.

To be invited to speak before a distinguished group such as the North Caroliniana Society is, to be sure, a privilege and a pleasure for a poor but honest bookseller, such as I.

I come before you as the Founder and Chairman of the North Carolina Chapter of the Yes-I-Am-The-Brother-Of/Son-Of Club, *Y-I-ATB-O/S-O*, pronounced “yacht bozo.” Within these ranks, I have gone from being Wallace’s son to Charles’s brother to Justin’s dad. And I must admit to being proud of them all, including my famous big brother.

It’s surprising how many of our club prickles at the mention of their noted relative, even become angry. Not I. On those occasions when someone slips and calls me “Charles,” I make a gentle correction: “No, no,” I say; “*Charles* is the one with the big bus and the great job; *I* am the one with the *hair*.”

And now, believe it or not, there’s a gentleman from Lexington, North Carolina, who has a hobby of collecting the autographs of *relatives* of well-known people, having us sign U.S. first-day stamp envelopes and send them back to him. He sent me one of William Saroyan and, of course, I was delighted to comply with his request. Now *that* man knows he’s getting real autographs, too; you always hear about how famous people have someone else sign most of their correspondence, their secretaries—or their brothers. Not us *YIATBOSOs*. We answer the ‘phone, sign the letters, drive our own cars. I bought an old limousine once. Drove it myself.

Charles drives *his* own car. I suspect Charles signs his own letters, too. And, unlike folks who sign a lot of documents, who develop a signature scrawl which begins with a recognizable letter or two and then becomes a squiggly line, Charles forms each letter clearly and thoughtfully. And, when you have him in, autographing books for a crowd, and the line is still snaking around past the art books section—and he’s due to leave for a TV interview in 20

minutes—just *try* leaning down and whispering that he might consider using a squiggle and just signing the things and not chatting with *everybody*. Withering look: “Well, I just can’t get done any faster.” Once, the TV people got their interview in his hotel room while he had dinner. Twice, we took names and promised everybody left in line that we’d send them a signed bookplate.

People do ask us of YIATBOSO just what our famous relative is *really* like. As though when the camera lights go off and the public goes home he turns into some priapic beast creating private mayhem. Some years ago, when Charles received a ticket for driving while impaired (*he* says a bee got in the car, or he had a sneezing fit, or something), you could just hear the tongues a’wagging. “Aha,” said they, “he’s just like the rest of us. Probably not happy, either.” And when CBS came to Chapel Hill for a “Town Meeting,” his co-anchor Leslie Stahl, upon finding that I was a Kuralt brother, fixed her flashing eyes upon me and said, “All right. Now let’s hear all the dirt.”

Well, folks, what you see is what you get. A bright, genuinely friendly man who has parlayed a lifetime of learning and a talent for finding just the right words into a career which anyone with any imagination at all must truly envy. A man who has worked hard at his craft and profession, a man who has earned his way with long hours and tough assignments, one who has endured stretches on the road and in the air which would exhaust any person not truly dedicated to the task.

Early on, Charles exhibited a penchant for journalism and broadcasting. At age 8, he would sit in the front yard and announce “They’re up to the line, and here’s the play. It’s Justice to Weiner, Justice to Weiner . . . down the sideline . . . TOUCHDOWN!” This to anyone who might happen to be passing by. Later on he wrote for the school paper and, at the age of 14, spent many evenings at the old Griffith Ball Park in Charlotte announcing games of the Charlotte Hornets, then a minor league baseball team. He ran his own control board and gave all the commercials, too. And while this tells a lot about Charles, it speaks volumes of our dad—who made the 15-mile trip *twice* each night: Once to take Charles there, and again to pick him up.

I think our whole lifetimes have been one long learning experience, perhaps as it should be.

We learned a lot from our parents, I’m sure—mostly by example and sometimes from a quiet “talking-to.” It’s remarkable how much they trusted us, a trust I don’t think either of us ever betrayed. Charles was out late or up early most of his young life. I spent some time on the road cavorting with known musicians, driving the family car all night from Tennessee to east Georgia to the Mississippi coast, playing jazz in clubs which most of you would wisely

avoid. I did learn how to climb out of a window carrying my string bass with me to avoid damage to either of us when the fights would break out. Even my time in the army didn't teach me as much about self-reliance and self-preservation as my tour with the jazz groups of the '50s.



Meanwhile, Charles had finished up at Carolina, having been the editor of *The Daily Tar Heel* and, of course, the broadcaster of Carolina baseball games. In high school he had won the "I Speak for Democracy" nationwide contest, had met Harry Truman at the White House and had learned all the verses of "Casey at the Bat." (He probably did more than just these things, but, if so, I didn't know about it.) In college he pursued his careers, collected a sheaf of honors, took a wife, and headed back to Charlotte to work for the newspaper at \$45 a week. (Probably some subsidy from the parents saw them through.) He soon won an Ernie Pyle Award for his feature writing, caught the eye of CBS, and was off to the Big Apple for an extended stay.

Our contacts were few, then. Charles's first job involved working the dog watch, spending all night on the 17th floor overseeing a ten-foot-square room filled with teletype machines, each bringing in stories from correspondents scattered all over the world—"News Central." His job was to tear off the stories and edit them into a five-minute radio newscast each hour—and, of course, to watch for breaking stories. Nothing fancy, just a table, chair, typewriter, paper—and a large coffee pot to keep him company. Some months into the job, Charles awoke to find himself covered with tiny red dots, head to toe. "Drink a lot of coffee?" the doctor asked. A first—relatively mild—encounter with the hazards of his profession.



The long hours were tough, no doubt. Then came the pressure. He became the head writer of the Douglas Edwards network television news program, "Olds Brings the News." He wrote home that the folks were not to worry. It represented a great chance for him but, if he were to fail, he would just join a long list of excellent writers who had gone before him. Doug Edwards won the time slot all three years Charles wrote it. Then, the year Huntley-Brinkley started—and began winning all the awards—Charles moved on to become a reporter for CBS

television, reporting mostly local New York news, and later began the prime-time “Eyewitness to History” for the network. Trouble again showed up, this time in the form of an advertiser who objected to some of the strong news content of the show and asked that it be toned down. Charles and his producers refused. “He looks too young for such a powerful program,” the sponsor then complained. Charles was replaced by Walter Cronkite. Shortly after that, I’m convinced, Charles’s full head of hair began to thin in response to his inner desire to look older.

Charles became a CBS News correspondent, the youngest they had ever had, and went off to Viet Nam to report. He found a company of other young men—all Vietnamese, for U.S. troops had not yet been committed to the battle—and went out into the jungle with them to get some of the war on film. The captain took his men and Charles off into a “safe” area for the filming—and ran into a battalion of the enemy. In a ten-minute fire fight, the company lost more than half its men, including the man just next to Charles. Through it all, Charles talked into his tape recorder, his quavering voice sometimes blotted out by the noise of the battle. Suddenly, the noises stopped; the enemy had quietly withdrawn into the cover of the jungle, perhaps warned that help was on the way.

When Charles returned home to Charlotte at Christmastime he played the tape for us. It is perhaps the most riveting piece of reporting I’ve ever heard. Mother was aghast. Perhaps this corresponding business was not such a glorious haven, after all.

When he lived in New York, Charles commuted over from Brooklyn Heights, leaving his lovely and very Southern wife and their two adored daughters to the brisk and sometimes chilly breezes off the river. On one of their strolls, trouble came to the marriage: The younger child of these two Southerners noticed from her carriage a Brooklyn street animal approaching. She correctly identified it: “Doo-ug,” she said, her very first word. Shortly after that, Charles accepted an assignment to cover all of South America from an office in Rio, and he went without the family. Though he commuted home to Brooklyn as frequently as possible, by the time he returned for good, the marriage was gone.



While Charles was off galloping into his career, I was slowly backing into mine. I held several jobs while a student at UNC, and wrote for the *DTH*, and got involved in a recall election brought on partly by the maltreatment of a football coach. I formed a little jazzband, and we played anything for

anybody—mostly jazz, but also rock, polkas, square dances . . . anything that paid. When the great 1956–57 basketball team started its winning ways, we found ourselves unable to get tickets to the games. So we donned our white dinner jackets, straw boaters, collected our instruments and showed up at the east door of Woollen Gym. “Who are you?” they asked. “We’re the band,” we replied. “Oh . . . okay, come on in.” Thus we became Carolina’s first, if entirely self-serving, pep band, and watched every home game of that championship season from the aisle just beneath the east goal. We played all the Tar Heel songs, mixing in some Dixieland, and even took a shot at the national anthem on one occasion.

I soon tired of working at the Pine Room from 6 to 8 a.m., setting up lunch (all to earn meals only, no money), and working at Graham Memorial, looking up telephone numbers and handing out ping-pong paddles much of the afternoon. I needed a *real* job. So I walked up one side of Franklin Street and down the other, applying for anything. The next-to-last building before the church was The Intimate Bookshop. By this time, I was just disgusted enough to put down anything on the application form. “Can add, perform most other functions, take orders, give orders and keep my mouth shut when appropriate,” I wrote. I got the job—forty cents an hour—partly, I think, because Bunny Smith had known and respected Charles from two years before.

Turnover in the bookshop personnel was rapid. Within two years I was the senior staff member except for the manager—who one night went off with a lovely junior staff member, leaving just me to run the shop. I became manager (fifty cents an hour). I took a wife, bought a house (again, the parental subsidy came into play) and then, after a seven-year apprenticeship, sold my lovely Austin-Healey roadster to raise \$1,000 earnest money to buy the bookshop. At age 26, I owed over a quarter of a million dollars—in 1965 money—with interest.



All of this was a long way from our upbringing. Charles is about four and a half years older than I, so he surely remembers more about Birmingham and Atlanta. In Birmingham, I remember, you could walk up the muddy red slope behind the house and look down into the whole town, more lights and smoke than you could ever imagine. Our front yard was three small terraces, one below the other, joining a street which pitched to the left at a steep angle. I discovered that my brother’s baseball, tossed with fierce intensity, would tumble across each successive terrace, roll into the street, take a sharp left turn and never

again be seen. It also worked with a neighboring child's baseball.

In Atlanta, the terrain was more level and, of course, my world was that of a mobile five-year-old. And Donnie and Doug across the street, whose mother let them walk on their bed in muddy galoshes. They told me so. My own mother found this practice unamusing. I gladly joined my brother and his friends when they went out in the woods behind the house with my mother's Cub Scout troop. I was tickled when I, the tag-along, was the only one who could identify the leaf of the peach tree. It was on every can of peaches, after all. But I also learned that emulating the actions of older children could be hazardous.

Charles and his friends delighted in using a neighbor's swing, a heavy wooden chair supported from a high tree limb by four stranded-wire cables. When they tired of swinging up and down, they would twist the chair around and around and then let go, causing a dizzying wobble—and also kinking the cables. When Donnie and Doug and I once tried the same trick, the neighbor came roaring out of the back door: “So *you’re* the ones ruining my swing,” he shouted, as we raced for home.

And I learned that the rules aren't always what they seem. When playing “I Spy,” I often found myself “It.” Whenever I’d “spy” somebody, they’d either tear off for home base before I could get there, or would yell “Oh, no you don’t,” and run in the opposite direction. This was puzzling and frustrating. So, when I came around the corner of a house and spied Charles—and so announced my find—and he denied it, I picked up a handy rock, flung it in his direction, and managed to find that soft spot on the crown of the head upon which to “bean” him gently.

Well! Blood was everywhere. Screaming. I sat down in the yard and watched as the kindly nurse from up the street took Charles in hand, pressed a handkerchief to his bloody head and helped him on a wobbly walk across the street to mother. I don’t recall feeling much guilt, but all the screaming had certainly dulled the satisfaction of a lucky hit. He wouldn’t really die, would he? Would I get his room if he did? I don’t recall the punishment, but it probably beat the talking-to about the muddy shoes on the bed.

Big brothers could certainly spoil good fun, too, I found, by pointing out right and wrong very much in the manner of parents. There we were, Donnie and Doug and I, bringing home the second wagon-load of Billy Bussie’s toys, when Charles happened to notice all this activity. It is true, he explained, that Billy Bussie is moving to Memphis with his family. But, he said, they are not planning to leave all these toys behind. We must take them back.

We were perplexed. Was this another joke? Was this like telling us he’d race me on his bike to the bottom of the hill and even give me a head start,

then when I'd ride my little Elgin like the wind and look around, victorious, at the bottom of the hill, there would be no-one else in sight? We returned the toys, but we did check later to see if they were gone.

The idea to go out on the train trestle was our own. Donnie and Doug ran to safety when the train came out of the woods. I was paralyzed. I laid down on the wooden cross-ties beside the rail, looking down into the busy street below, as the train passed completely over me. I'm told healthy people fainted on Piedmont Road before I picked myself up and trotted off along after the train toward home.



When we moved to Charlotte, where we both feel we “grew up,” our worlds truly changed and expanded. I went off to school now, and we both learned how to hitch-hike in to the bus stop, some six miles away. Friends were rather far-flung, but we both learned the closest paths through the woods to get over to their houses, and we knew everybody within several miles. We could filch a turnip from a neighbor's field on the way (we even carried little packets of salt for the occasion), or lounge in the mulberry tree at the edge of Mr. Shrum's lower pasture, eating mulberries and swapping lies—some of them about how good those mulberries tasted. We learned about human nature, a little about animals, too.

I once brought home a big tabby cat that had befriended me along the way. He was a beauty, all fluffy, with a loud purr. As I brought him in the front door, my mother asked if I was sure the other cats wouldn't mind. “The cats won't fight,” I maintained. After all, *dogs* fight cats. Just then, as our big black Tom strolled into the hall, there was a sudden explosion in my arms, claws were sunk deep into my chest and shoulder as the tabby leapt for the safety of the hanging hall light. When he hit the floor, he was nothing but a blur as he and the Tom grabbed, spit, bounced off the walls and stairs and sent tufts of fur and fluff flying into the air. For some minutes after this stunning display, after the tabby had managed to flee through the open front door, bits of dust and hair could be seen floating in the sunlight of the front hall. After that, we still took in many strays, but only those who managed to gain prior acceptance on their own.

Dad had moved us all to Charlotte to become the head of the welfare department, as it was called then. Mecklenburg, the largest county, had a woefully small staff at the time. Many evenings, dad went out to collect some luckless

soul or another who needed some place to stay, and sometimes these folks wound up at our house. One man, Eddie, who was called “simple,” a big bear of a man in blue coveralls, seemed to have more trouble than most. We learned, I think, that the least privileged of us all still had a dignity, and deserved the compassion and safety and care afforded anyone else.

My mother went on to become a social worker, too, after we got out of the house. She admitted only once to having done what she called “bad social work.” A young daughter of a client was the only one in her school class who didn’t have white boots to wear to school, a fact which was causing the girl to feel great shame for herself and her family. My mother took the girl downtown and bought her those boots, herself. We learned that the rules can’t always be followed precisely.



Summers were often spent in Onslow County, at the home of Grandmother Bishop. John Bishop, an early idol of my brother, is just a blur of memory to me. But Grandmother made flapjacks, gave us oranges with metal tubes stuck into them to help pull out all the juice, and let us help put wood in the cookstove and pump water on the back porch. We learned that, while life could be hard at times, it also held wonderful pleasures. We helped out at tobacco time, riding the sleds through the fields behind the mule, proudly “helping” by holding down all the leaves picked so far. We were allowed to stay up late and help with the curing; we’d pull up the thermometer and watch solemnly for the little wax cone in the window to start tipping over, all the while listening to wonderful tall tales and enjoying glasses of lemonade.

One interesting sidelight to life in Onslow County: My grandmother’s family, the Gurganuses, live on the southwest branch of the New River. The river had been the only roadway in the early years there. Some eight or ten families seemed to own most of the county, and the population was truly sparse. And while there were probably no other persons named Gurganus within a thousand miles of Onslow County, there was another such family *in* Onslow County, on the *northeast* branch of the river. However, my mother insisted, *these* Gurganuses were of *no* relation to *us*. We learned that family matters can become convoluted, indeed.



There were no libraries nearby in that rural area outside of Charlotte, but there were plenty of books in the house. My favorite was a thick volume called *Folk Tales of All Nations*, which I read over and over again. And *Fair Play and Manners Can Be Fun*, both by Munro Leaf. Later on we could tackle the full sets of Dickens, O. Henry, Goldsmith, Shakespeare and Mark Twain, and those marvellous volumes of the Wonder Books, and Richard Halliburton's books of travels, both the Occident and the Orient.

So we were readers from the very beginning. Later on, the radio would usurp some of our interest, particularly Tom Mix, Jack Armstrong, Sky King, and the comedy shows. But we never stopped reading. Television was certainly a fascinating new toy, but, early on, most of it was so silly as to pose little competition to a good book.

We were even involved in early television. In the early '50s, I played my guitar and sang a soprano "You Are My Sunshine" on Fred Kirby's "Round-Up" show as part of the Charlotte Boys Choir, while, upstairs, Charles worked in the summer for WBTV in downtown Charlotte speaking in a rich baritone as a substitute announcer. Those were good days. We got a new 1951 Chevrolet, replacing grandmother's 1938 model, which had proved so sturdy and invaluable during the early years in Charlotte. Charles had his older friends, of course, but was happy to exercise his new driving license to take me a few miles away to the house of one of my buddies. Or Charles and I would roam the woods behind the house, exploring the creek in both directions, naming every little "cove" and "rapids," and searching each pool for crayfish and minnows. Poppa made root beer from packaged extract and yeast, and stored it deep in the waters of the spring to age and to chill.

And, when all else palled, we had the "bustin' grounds" to amuse us. All country people used the nearest out-of-sight gulley for dumping trash, and, before plastic, this included a great many glass bottles. We would line them up and throw at them until they were all broken or we ran out of stones. Later on, we'd take aim with a .22 rifle at the tin cans, being careful to make sure errant shots went into the clay bank behind the target. Archaeologists will someday label this a ritual spot for exorcising destructive tendencies, as well it may have been. You could break a Mason jar with a little tap, but medicine bottles required good aim and plenty of power.



When Grandmother Bishop came to live with us after the war, bringing her car, she sold off all the old farm—that enchanting old house and the acres and acres of fertile farmland—and helped supplement the family finances at a time when Charles was off at college, I was preparing to go, and our little sister Catherine was fitted for braces on her teeth. Many years earlier, she and the family had agreed to sell their half of a useless piece of land down at the North Carolina coast. This land had been given to a Gurganus for his efforts during the Revolution and, as my grandmother said, if they gave land according to how you fought, he must have been a mighty poor soldier, at that, as it was mostly swamp and a little bare island. They used to load the hogs up on a barge and pole them over to this spit of land; the hogs would run down into the surf and catch the little sand-crabs for dinner, and then be punted back to home. That hog-farm is now called Topsail Island.

Our dad did a little better with real estate. When he was out driving around the state, installing offices for the new Social Security Administration, he noticed a piece of land near Fayetteville. He bought it with a mind to raise Scuppernong grapes for a living—and to have a place to scratch out a living if the depression were to get any worse. But the soil lacked something, and the vines would only live a few years and then die off—and then a wildfire destroyed the rest of them. So he leased the land for enough to pay the mortgage and the taxes, and later sold it for a tidy sum when I was in school. He took all of the money and put it into chemical stocks, feeling that plastics were a coming thing, and his money grew nicely. Then he switched to power companies and came up with a solid retirement fund to add to the Social Security and government retirement payments. Still, Charles and our lovely sister Catherine and I have each been allowed to make use of these shares of stock at times to help fund homes and business interests until we could get on our feet.



We've had some incredible advantages. We've had parents—and grandparents—who've cared about us and have generously showed it. We've managed to escape danger and elude poor health. We've been given the benefit of an extraordinary education: Early reading and travel; the privilege of attending a great university, talking with and learning from brilliant people, learning how to learn, discovering from our samplings just what it is we *want* to learn. We've had music in our lives, a good brush with religion, the means to explore those

avenues of interest which truly attracted us, and the pleasure of some lovely company along the way.

Luck, too. I just happened to land in the book business, and I can't think of a more satisfying lane to have traipsed along through my life—plenty of side roads, surprises and serendipity.

Charles has really *made* most of his luck. He decided early on to take the job with the newspaper when just out of college—at half the salary offered by the TV station. But he wanted to *write* the news, not just read it; he offered to write a special feature about “people” on his own time for no extra pay (and even develop his own pictures), a feature which won a prize that eventually landed him in New York. He played by the rules there, and then, once he had some credentials, invited the establishment to let him try out a novel idea—that of just touring around in a bus looking for stories out in the land *between* the important news centers. The baskets of letters from viewers convinced everyone that the idea was a good one.

But one of the best pieces of good luck ever to come to Charles was not made known to him until much later. In 1965, Charles was dispatched to Hyde Park, to prepare a report on the imminent death of Sir Winston Churchill and his connections with President Roosevelt. This, you may recall, was before the widespread use of videotape, and very few film pieces were available for use. Charles stayed up all night preparing to do a “live” review of the life of Sir Winston. On the morning of Churchill's death, Charles, calling on his own studies of history, inspired by his university experiences, recounted the many triumphs of the great man, citing his speeches and placing the hero in the fabric of British history; Charles was before the cameras without a break for more than 30 minutes, speaking from a text prepared only in his experience and education, there at the end when the announcement came of the passing of the great man. When the picture returned to the New York studios, Eric Sevareid turned to his colleague, Walter Cronkite, and, greatly moved, declared Charles's presentation one of the best jobs of news reporting he had ever seen.

Such comments were evidently not lost on the CBS brass. While others often complained of over-control from “upstairs,” Charles was usually left to prepare and present his reports in his own way.

You don't just luck into ten or so Emmy Awards, three Peabody Awards and the DuPont Award, or become Broadcaster of the Year just because of your connections. Your good looks alone won't cause *Time* Magazine to call you the “laureate of the common man.” Your books don't show up on the best-seller lists every week for a year because you were in the right place at the right time. You're not presented with 15 or 20 honorary degrees because people like your

smile; you don't find yourself in halls of fame because a coin came up the right way. Some of the awards Charles receives are just in good fun. During the bicentennial year, as he moved about the country collecting stories, he found himself being honored in many different ways. As Roland Giduz reports in his recent book, *Who's Gonna Cover 'Em Up?*, Charles was made a Kentucky Colonel at one stop, and an official member of an Indian tribe at the next. His cameraman of many years, Izzy Bleckman, suggested, sardonically, that Charles was working his way up to honorary Jew.

In 1986, the bicentennial year of the Statue of Liberty, Charles called upon me and asked to use some of the videotape scenes which I had shot the previous year on a visit to Slovenia, then the northwest part of Yugoslavia. Over some years of investigation, I had discovered that the Kuralts had originally come from Bavaria; they had travelled, in about the year 1000, with the Bishops of Freising, over the Julian Alps and down into the Pannonian Plain. The Bishops had been given a huge tract of land on the eastern slopes by the Holy Roman Emperor Otto II in 976. Their task was to build a castle at Skofja Loka, near present-day Ljubljana, to stop the flow of Magjars and other tribes from the east down into Italy. Many of the records were kept in Slovene, and comprise the earliest example of any written Slavic language, and are now kept in the castle. Among those writings is a record of the ownership of a certain "huba" number 5—farm number 5—in the village of Zabnica. In 1380, it was owned by a Kuralt, and it remains so to this day. I was to find, from a Kuralt genealogist in Ljubljana, that the grandfather of the grandfather of my grandfather had spent much of his life as owner of that farm before leaving in the mid-18th century, probably for Graz, now in southern Austria.

Through a Slovenian publishing house, I had obtained a copy of the telephone directory for the area, about the size of eastern North Carolina. I had written to everyone in the book, gotten a dozen or so letters in return, and we went to spend a week in their land. We invited everyone to a "re-union," apparently unheard of in Yugoslavia, and, despite dire predictions by the hotel management, 85 Kuralts showed up! In that area, to be a Kuralt was rather like being a Yates in Chapel Hill. Certainly, they were all related, but who really cared?

Well, there were folks from every walk of life: A lawyer, two doctors, an electrician, several working in television and printing, the mother of an Olympic skiing champion, teachers, a priest, realtors, insurance men, a wine maker, and yes, still a few farmers. There was also a member of the police, a man something like a magistrate in their system. He and his group sat rather apart from the others. He was, of course, a Communist. I recalled that many of the others had pronounced the word "communists" with a decided hiss in their

voices. Oh, my God, I thought. The cats won't fight, will they? They didn't.

It turns out that many of these Kuralts were descendents of wine merchant Janez Kuralt who, over the years and several wives, had 32 children. On the occasion of his 100th birthday, he was photographed at his party being served cake by his 14-year-old daughter.

We had shot a lot of videotape of our reunion party, the people, the countryside and its magnificent scenery. Charles used parts of it in his story which closed the CBS News broadcast July 4, 1986. In it, he noted that on the Fourth of July we celebrate our ancestors, the ones who struggled to get to the United States and managed to come through Ellis Island and survive in this new world—and make us American. Let's not forget those who stayed, he said; those who suffered through the wars, the famine, the political and social upheaval, and the desperate times. Showing the tape of our party in Ljubljana, he said, "My brother had a wonderful time with all these people. . . . All I could think of, watching them, was Joseph Andreas Kuralt, the one who didn't stay. You have somebody like that in your own past, the one who left all the scenes of home behind and took the great chance. Whoever he was, he wasn't easily frightened. Before the day ends, let's have a toast to him."

Well, there wasn't a dry eye in the house.



Charles has a way of making difficult stories come out looking easy. It takes a lot of hard work, no doubt, and talent honed by years of experience. Of course, hard work doesn't have to be unpleasant. And help comes from many quarters, some of it entirely unexpected. His television crews, both the remarkable guys who've toured the country with him all these years and the New York studio bunch, are all consummate professionals, some of the best anywhere at their craft. Well-wishers from all over the country pass along story ideas, more than he could use in a lifetime. And, occasionally, he is sought out in person by someone who has a story to tell.

When Charles went to Russia with President Reagan in 1988, other reporters were too busy to pay attention to an elderly Russian man who sought out the television crews and asked anxiously if he might meet with someone. Charles obliged him. They met at a park bench, and the man told Charles, through an interpreter, that he had been a prisoner of the Nazis in a camp which also housed a number of American prisoners some yards away in a separate compound. As the camp's only dentist, he regularly talked with the Americans,

and he hatched a plot with an American officer. The Americans enjoyed much better conditions than the Russians, who had little to eat and were ill-clothed. The Americans offered to share their resources, and would regularly heave a bag of food, cigarettes and clothing over the fences when the guards weren't watching, tons of supplies over a period of months, doubtlessly saving the lives of many of the Russian prisoners.

The camp commandant discovered the activity and forced the Americans to stand out in the compound all day until someone would disclose the name of the Russian organizer. No one did. It would have meant certain death to the dentist and, possibly, to many others, as well. The elderly Russian had written down the names of some of the American prisoners and their home towns, and now wanted to find a way to thank his benefactors after all these years.

The political story Charles produced was most moving and impressive, and included much pomp and ceremony and the power of international diplomacy and the two national leaders. Charles's handling of the information brought to him by the elderly Russian dentist helped bring to light another powerful story—an homage to all of man, if you will. The Russian and several of his fellow prisoners were later brought to the United States for a “re-union” with the American officer and others who had been prisoners in that same camp, a fitting cap to a wonderful story.



Andy Rooney, the wonderfully curmudgeonly commentator for CBS, stepped out of that role at a recent “roast” held for Charles. He said that “while Charles is fond of saying that he doesn’t cover any of the ‘important’ stories, he doesn’t really believe that. I think most writers hope they are writing in metaphor—that is, what they are saying stands for a lot more than the specific example they are using at the time, and I think Charles Kuralt feels that in the examples he uses of Americans around this country that he is pointing to a better America, and I think he has something better in mind than the specific person he is talking about at the time. It’s the good thing about his pieces.” Charles points up the very good things that go on in this world. And he does it with a certain style, one that others have had difficulty in copying, Rooney said. He added, “Charles Kuralt does more things well than anybody in our business. Not only that, he does them better than anybody in our business. He’s the best writer, the best reporter, the best producer and he presents his

material on the air better than anybody else. And in addition to that, he manages to be a nice guy all the time.”

What you see is what you get.

And, I'd have to say, he's a pretty nice fellow to be the “Brother Of,” as well.



Presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award

*by
William C. Friday*

Wallace, that applause tells you how grateful we all are for that wonderful paper. We are glad that you are Charles's younger brother, that you are president of the YIATBO/SO Club of Chapel Hill, and that you live and work among us.

Now I have the privilege of making a presentation on behalf of the North Caroliniana Society.

In the *New York Times* in 1992 this sentence appeared: "People talk too much on television and things go too fast." That's why CBS Sunday morning was born. My authority for that is Charles Kuralt. For fifteen years or thereabouts, CBS Sunday Morning has been a show about a deer running through the woods or a group of people in straw hats out counting birds or an art exhibit or the milestones or weather predictions or the fellow in bib overalls talking about a place in Nebraska. It is a show about the heart of America, human dignity, human kindness, and personal courage. It is a show about all of us. Just by letting nature speak, Charles can lay claim to having aired more silence than any other show in the history of television. But it is those issue-oriented essays that introduce the show that mold the thinking in our country—our thinking about places, about the human condition, about those who need help. And these essays often bring on action. As we all know they have won countless awards, and Bill Geist and John Leonard and Eugenia Zuckerman and Betsy Aaron and all the rest follow his gentle lead as he weaves together a thoughtful and instructive experience for all of us each Sunday morning.

So, Charles, we are pleased with all the Emmys, the Peabodys, and the other awards that you have received from your peers. We are proud of your recognition, dear friend, as the watchful guardian and eloquent spokesman for those who have no powerful voice of advocacy in our society. But this evening, in presenting you the North Caroliniana Society Award, I do so on behalf of all of your friends and contemporaries here at home not only because we are proud of what you have achieved and your splendid career but because you have achieved this great acclaim by being yourself, and by always carrying with you your Tar Heel and University heritage. So we salute you tonight as North

Carolina's ambassador to all countries and all lands and all peoples, and we do so with a grateful heart. Here you are, Charles.



Response

by
Charles Kuralt

I don't know how long I have been reading the proceedings of these meetings in the attractive monographs that H. G. Jones sends out, and thinking, one of these years I'm going to have to get to one of those dinners. I am awfully glad that I finally did.

There are many satisfactions for me in this evening. To receive this award from the hand of Bill Friday, the greatest North Carolinian of them all in my opinion, heart-felt and and long-held....

To meet so many old friends, and people whose acquaintance I treasure, and so many others I have admired for so long....

To hear a speech about myself from my brother, some of it true....

To have our father present, who has been our infallible guide and guardian and hero for all the years of our lives, and who still inspires my brother and sister and me, and who is still giving service to our state. Way back when I was young, we lived in a number of rented premises, about which my father was always planting trees and flowers and grapevines. When I asked him why, he said you should always leave a place better than you found it. That he certainly has done in North Carolina.

Other members of my family send their good wishes to you. My wife, Petie, stayed home to wrestle with an eye problem, figuring it was better to leave me on my own tonight than to end up blind in one eye. My sister, Catherine, had hoped to be here but was detained by developments in the family business in Seattle. My daughter, Lisa, had planned to come, but finds herself housebound in Winston-Salem with a 7-year-old and a one-year-old, my grandsons, and a husband whose company picked this week to send him on one of his periodic trips to Hong Kong rather than permit him to stay home and babysit, as he had planned to do. My other daughter, Susan, is in the midst of an intense advertising campaign in New York, and without her presence there, as I understand it, the old firm of Young & Rubicam may fail by Monday. But all the Kuralts are here in spirit.

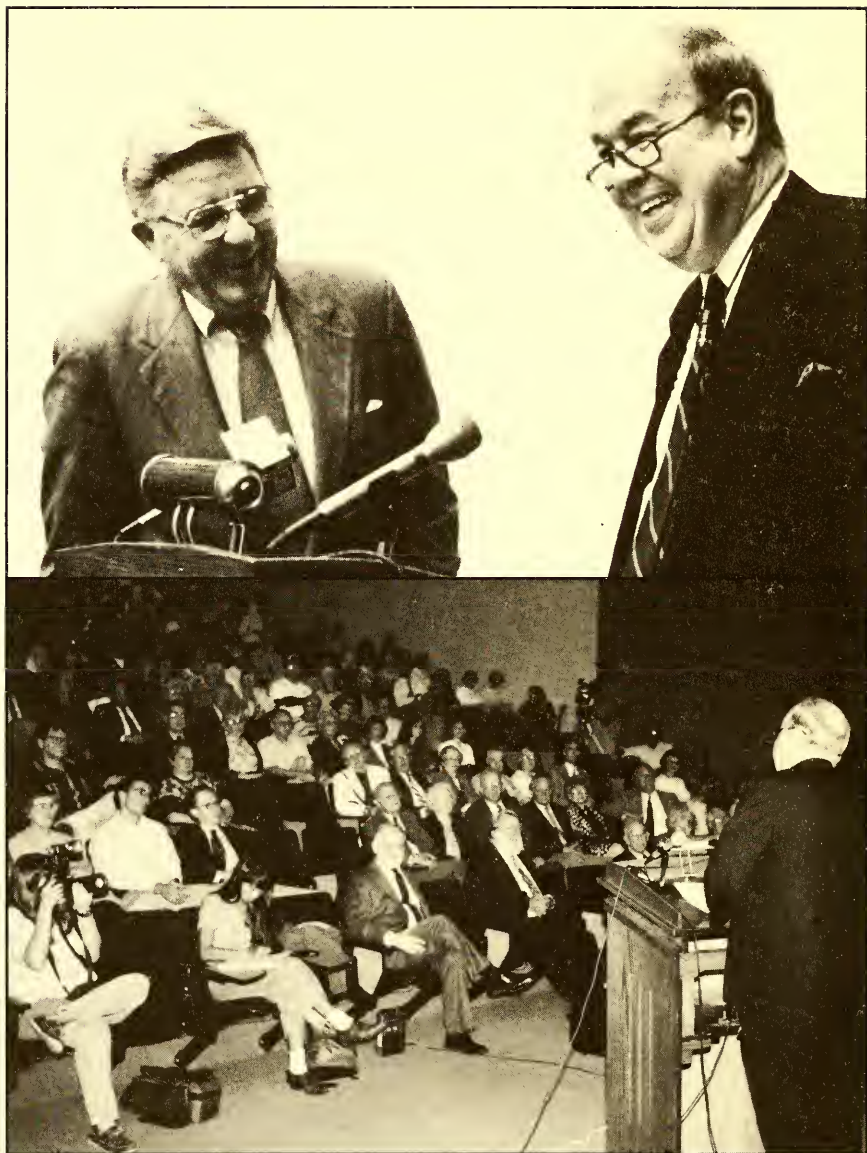
And the final satisfaction for this Kuralt is to find that even after a long enforced absence in exile, I am still counted a North Carolinian. I am very proud to be one.



A Kuralt Album

21 May 1993





Top, President Friday and Charles Kuralt are captured by photographer Hugh Morton before the broadcaster addressed a crowd of 300 in the afternoon. (Lower photo, and others except as noted, by Jerry Cotten.)



At dinner President Friday (right) chats with the Kuralts—Wallace, Jr., Wallace, Sr., and Charles. Below, Wallace, Sr. is flanked by Wallace, Jr., and Brenda.



Brother Wallace, Jr., delivered the main address (top); at bottom, Charles Kuralt accepts the North Caroliniana Society Award, which sits at left. (Lower photo by Hugh Morton.)



Charles Kuralt is greeted by old friends: Top, with Clarence Whitefield; bottom, with John Ehle.



Top, with Bill Finlator; bottom, with Georgia Kyser.



Top, with Frank and Julia Daniels; bottom, with William and Gloria Blythe.



Top, with Bill Cochrane; bottom, with Roy Parker, Jr.



Top, discussing the Arctic with H. G. Jones (photo by Hugh Morton); bottom, Ida Friday and Gladys Coates.



Top, John Sanders, Chris Fordham, and Julia Morton; bottom, Bill and Virginia Powell, flanked by sons Charles and his wife Janet (left) and John and his wife Tracey (right).



The North Caroliniana Society, Inc.
North Carolina Collection
Wilson Library, UNC Campus Box 3930
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-3930

Chartered by the Secretary of State on 11 September 1975 as a private nonprofit corporation under provisions of Chapter 55A of the *General Statutes of North Carolina*, the North Caroliniana Society is dedicated to the promotion of increased knowledge and appreciation of North Carolina's heritage. This it accomplishes in a variety of ways: encouragement of scholarly research and writing in and the teaching of state and local history; publication of documentary materials, including the numbered, limited-edition *North Caroliniana Society Imprints* and *North Caroliniana Society Keepsakes*; sponsorship of professional and lay conferences, seminars, lectures, and exhibitions; commemoration of historic events, including sponsorship of markers and plaques; and assistance to the North Carolina Collection and North Carolina Collection Gallery of the University of North Carolina Library and other cultural organizations, such as the Friends of the Library, the Friends of the Archives, the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, and the North Carolina Writers Conference.

Incorporated by H. G. Jones, William S. Powell, and Louis M. Connor, Jr., who soon were joined by a distinguished group of North Carolinians, the Society was limited to one hundred members for its first decade. However, it does elect from time to time additional individuals meeting its strict criterion of "adjudged performance" in service to their state's culture—i.e., those who have demonstrated a continuing interest in and support of the historical, literary, and cultural heritage of North Carolina. The Society, a tax-exempt organization under provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, expects service rather than dues. For its programs, it depends upon the contributions, bequests, and devises of its members and friends. Its IRS number is 56-1119848. Upon request, contributions to the Society may be counted toward membership in the Chancellors' Club. The Society administers the Archie K. Davis Fund, given in 1987 by the Research Triangle Foundation in honor of its retiring board chairman and the Society's longtime president.

A highlight of the Society's year is the presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award for long and distinguished service in the encouragement, production, enhancement, promotion and preservation of North Caroliniana. Starting with Paul Green, the Society has recognized Tar Heels such as Albert Coates, Sam J. Ervin, Jr., Sam Ragan, Gertrude S. Carraway, John Fries Blair, William and Ida Friday, William S. Powell, Mary and James Semans, David Stick, William M. Cochrane, Emma Neal Morrison, and Burke Davis. The proceedings of the awards banquets, published in the *Imprints* series, furnish rare glimpses into the lives of those recognized.

The Society has its headquarters in the North Carolina Collection, the "Conscience of North Carolina," which seeks to preserve for present and future generations all that has been or is published by North Carolinians regardless of subject and about North Carolina and North Carolinians regardless of author or source. In this mission the Collection's clientele is far broader than the University community; indeed, it is the entire citizenry of North Carolina, as well as those outside the state whose research extends to North Carolina or North Carolinians. Members of the North Caroliniana Society share a very special relationship to this unique Collection that dates back to 1844 and stands unchallenged as the largest and most comprehensive repository in America of published materials about a single state. The North Carolina Collection Gallery, opened in 1988, adds exhibition and interpretive dimensions to the Collection's traditional services. These combined resources fulfill the vision of President David L. Swain (1801-1868), who founded the Collection; Librarian Louis Round Wilson (1876-1979), who nurtured it; and Philanthropist John Sprunt Hill (1869-1961), who generously endowed it. All North Carolinians are enriched by this precious legacy.

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